Animal Rights and Humane Education Documentary

India Braver

My name is India! I’m 17 years old, currently a junior attending a public high school in central New Jersey. I attended the Brown Leadership Institute over the past summer (Summer of 2010), and it was truly an enlightening experience, in addition to being thoroughly enjoyable and excellent. I learned a lot, and I wanted to share some of the new skills, in addition to the new ideas, I developed while attending Brown’s leadership institution with my peers back home. I took Documentary Film for Social Change, an eye-opening course that taught about the power of media. In those two weeks, I learned how a simple, student-made movie could impact a large amount of people, stirring them to action through imagery and narration. As a student there, I was also given the opportunity to produce my own documentary, which was screened in front of the rest of the Leadership Institute! I was shocked and delighted by the overwhelmingly positive response, and I realized I had the potential to make movies with an impact, just like the filmmakers I watched in class had.

The documentary my partner and I produced for class centered on animal rights and humane education. We visited the Pawtucket Animal Shelter and also contacted the Providence Animal Rescue League and attended one of their group meet-ups at the Aspire Restaurant in Providence. We learned a lot, and we were able to share our experiences through our documentary, which can be viewed here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3mlFbvGFX8

Since I thoroughly enjoyed learning about humane education and I was already a big advocate for animal rights (I’m a vegan), my action plan was originally supposed to consist of showing my peers at school my documentary and starting an animal rights club at my school. However, due to budget cuts, I was unable to secure a teacher advisor for the club (The teacher’s union requires club advisors to be paid), so I instead devoted my time to an already existing club at my school, the LiNK Club, and my action plan completely evolved to focus on human rights, as opposed to animal rights. My passion for film, which was awakened this summer, was still an essential part of the plan, however, and my interest in LiNK, interestingly enough, also came about because of my passion for documentaries.

One day, after school, the day of Homecoming, in fact, my school’s Liberty in North Korea Club (LiNK Club) showed a free screening of the never-before seen documentary Hiding. I chose to attend, rather than attending the homecoming football game, because of my obsession with documentaries since this summer and because I was interested in LiNK’s cause. Hiding told the story of North Korean refugees, whose human rights had been violated and who had escaped to China to seek political asylum. Unfortunately for them though, the Chinese government was determined to send all refugees back to North Korea, where they would be sentenced to hard labor in labor camps. LiNK was an organization set up to assist these Koreans in hiding to make the perilous journey to other, safer countries, like South Korea where many of them had family or the United States. (See LiNK’s website here: http://linkglobal.org/) It costs approximately $2500 to rescue one refugee (people from the LiNK
Since my time in the club, I’ve helped organize a variety of fundraisers, and we’ve currently raised over $3000, enough to rescue one refugee! However, we’re determined to rescue as many refugees as possible, and in the nation-wide fundraising competition, my school is currently in the lead. The winning LiNK chapter gets to send two members to South Korea to meet with the refugees they’ve helped rescue. To see the current leader board, click here:

http://chapters.linkglobal.org/campaigns/leaderboard

However, in addition to fundraising, a key strategy for our LiNK chapter is education. Not only have we organized multiple screenings of documentaries, like Hiding, to educate our peers about what we’re raising money for, but I also directed a music video on behalf of the club, that also serves to help distinguish our cause and educate our student body. I was so glad to be able to finally put to use the valuable skills I picked up during the Documentary Film for Social Change Leadership course! The music video I directed can be viewed here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VVMWcIKgQ&feature=channel_video_title

In addition to producing a music video, the LiNK Club at my school has worked so hard to raise the necessary money to rescue a refugee. Originally, the goal was to raise enough to rescue one refugee ($2500), but now, the other members and I are intent on rescuing at least two. We’ve had several organized fundraisers so far, in order to raise the necessary money, and we have more planned. Our first major fundraiser was a food-eating competition; I stayed after school for over 9 hours that day, cooking, cleaning, and judging the competition. It was a huge success; we raised over $200, and everyone had a lot of fun.

Our second major fundraiser was a penny drive, which we called, Change for Change! Every class competed against every other class to raise as much money as possible; it was a major success! We raised over $1000. Our third major fundraiser was a Taps (a basketball game where teams of two try to “tap” in as many baskets as possible) Tournament held after school one day in our school’s gym; a lot of people turned up, so not only did we raise a lot of money, but we also managed to draw a lot more attention to our club’s cause. The rest of the money we’ve raised is a result of smaller fundraisers, like bakes sales, and donations, but we have several more events planned for the future, like weekly garage sales throughout the month of May!
There are about a dozen active members in the school’s LiNK chapter, so on average, we’ve each raised more than $250 so far! I’m not sure that they are all comfortable with their names being on the Internet, if this ends up in the Action Plan Library, so I’d rather not list their names. However, they are all huge assets to the club, and our chapter president in particular, is one of the most hardworking individuals I know. In addition to the other 11 diligent members of the club, our LiNK chapter has, now on two occasions, met with nomads, who are actual representatives of the national LiNK organization that travel around for a living, educating various student bodies.

Since joining LiNK, I’ve learned a lot, and hopefully, I’ve managed to help my peers learn a lot as well, through all the activism and educational outreach our LiNK Chapter does. I’ve learned that sometimes, you need to be assertive and make your voice heard, if you want your classmates to pay attention to a cause that’s important to you. I’ve learned that organization and proper planning are absolutely essential to any organized fundraiser. I’ve learned that I’m, personally, more comfortable behind a camera than in front of it, but both directors and actors are responsible for bringing about social change through film. I’ve also learned that the world doesn’t end if one chooses to attend a documentary screening instead of Homecoming; I’m so happy that I did.

I’ve been really motivated to work on my new action plan, being involved with LiNK, mainly because my original action plan didn’t seem plausible at the time, and LiNK was struggling to stay afloat. Since I couldn’t start my own club, I’m determined to keep LiNK alive! The other members in the club are also extremely dedicated, and working with them has spurred me to keep up all the good work we’ve been doing all year long! Next year, it’s going to be a rocky transition, since the majority of the other members are graduating, but I have faith that the remaining members and I will pull through and hopefully raise even more money and rescue even more refugees! I was really upset that I didn’t manage to attend the Leadership Institute Symposium on Social Action, but hopefully, next year, that will change as well!